

## WELCOME TO SAVENAC HISTORIC TREE NURSERY...

one of the oldest U.S. Forest Service nurseries in the West. Savenac has an interesting past. We invite you to take our self-guided tour and learn how a honeymoon on horseback resulted in one of the largest and most beautiful nurseries in the West. How that nursery was temporarily destroyed by fires which swept through the region. And how the widespread use of the automobile resulted in even more changes at the site.



Romance, tragedy, technology, and history. See for yourself why Savenac has captured the imagination of visitors for almost a century and why it was nominated and determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

U.S. FOREST SERVICE



HAUGAN, MONTANA

## 1. A VISION FUELED BY FIRE

In 1907, while on his honeymoon, forester Elers Koch viewed the abandoned homestead along Savenac Creek and dreamed of building a nursery. Work began the following year. But by 1910, fires destroyed the fledgling nursery along with millions of forested acres throughout the region. The “Big Burn” could not destroy Koch’s dream. Trees were needed to reforest the land and, by 1915, the nursery was fully stocked with 10 million young trees. By the mid-1930s the nursery was the largest supplier of tree seedlings in the U.S. Be sure to notice the trees growing here. They were planted after the fire and still stand, more than 80 years later, as a tribute to Elers Koch’s dream and the resiliency of a land scarred by fire.



*Savenac, 1915*

## 2. BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

You are now standing on the original Mullan Road, the first engineered road in the northwest. Named after Lt. John Mullan who led the military expedition and built the road between 1859 and 1863, Mullan Road became the primary pioneer route for prospectors into Montana, Idaho and Canada. Finally in 1914, after years of inadequate schools and even less adequate road maintenance, residents of the west end of Missoula County rebelled and a new government—Mineral



*Yellowstone Bridge*

County—was formed. Thanks to new government leadership, some creative pothole filling, help from area merchants, and liquid encouragement by local saloonkeepers, what was renamed the “Yellowstone

Trail” was open and

running, linking Missoula to Wallace, Idaho and beyond. Directly ahead lies the old Yellowstone Bridge from those early road building days. The new road opened the

nursery to automobile traffic and visitors, which in turn led to new improvements to the appearance of the nursery.

## 3. 2+2=TREE

In the early days, trees at the nursery were called 2-2 stock. A tree spent 2 years in a seed bed like the ones originally in

this field, and then 2 more in a transplant bed. While here, notice the remains of the original irrigation system throughout the field. Although seed beds were irrigated by ditches from Savenac Creek as early as 1909, it wasn’t until 1933 that an underground irrigation system was installed. By 1938, the system also provided domestic water to the new buildings.

## 4. ELMERS KOCH: FORESTRY AT ITS FINEST

In addition to founding the Savenac Nursery, Elers Koch was Assistant Regional Forester in the Northern Region and is remembered as a pioneer in the field of forestry and forest conservation. His greatest satisfaction came from planting trees.

“It is always a joy to see them and watch their development, year by year,” Koch wrote. “When a Forester goes to St. Peter for a final accounting, I am sure that when he is asked what he has done with his life, if he can point to thousands of acres of a once ugly burn now covered with a growing forest, it will offset many sins.” Koch’s love of growing trees did not go unnoticed by his colleagues. “Koch Specials” were trees left uncut in harvest areas to provide a seed source for new trees. The larch in front of you has long been known as the Koch Tree in memory of Elers and his contribution not only to this site but to the field of forestry.



*Elers Koch, 1914*

## 5. GROWING INNOVATION

Up the hill from here are the remains of the original seed extractory. It’s important to note that in addition to being

a leading supplier of seedlings, Savenac was also a pioneer in research and development. Many of the techniques perfected during its formative years are still in use today. In addition to developing hardy varieties of trees, Savenac started using burlap-covered tree bales, instead of heavy wooden crates, to help cut shipping weight. Bales also made it easier to pack the mules which carried trees from the railroad to the planting camps. Savenac also developed the use of “shingle tow,” instead of sphagnum moss, to keep seedlings moist when being shipped. This shredded sawdust was free at local sawmills. Today, nurseries all over the country prefer “shingle tow” when they can get it.



*Early transportation of seedlings*

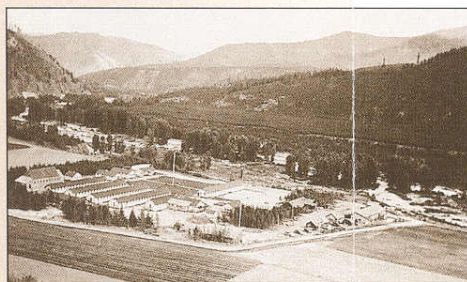
## 6. NEW JOBS, LASTING WORKS

In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps was established to provide jobs for young men during the Depression. In 1935, approximately 200 men were posted across the St. Regis River from Savenac at Camp Taft. They cleared land for seedlings, and built a new administration building, cottages, a packing plant, a seed extractory, and the bridge where you're standing. The CCC also improved the grounds, constructing the formal landscaped entrance and lagoon. These improvements created a unique and unexpected destination for a new generation of tourists—one which lives on today.

## 7. FORM FOLLOWED FUNCTION

As Savenac's mission and activities have changed, so have its buildings and overall architecture.

From simple log cabins to clapboard bunkhouses, the buildings have represented the work at the nursery. After 20 years of growth, nursery demands outgrew the facility and it was time to rebuild, starting with the service buildings at the north end of the site which all date back to the 1930s. In 1932 the state of Montana abandoned the Yellowstone Trail and built Highway 10, which is the frontage road today. With the availability of CCC labor, the Forest



*Camp Taft, 1937*

Service rebuilt on a new, formal plan oriented to the new road. This plan separated the service areas and seed beds in back from the visitor/administration area in front and created a showplace to welcome visitors and display the purpose of the nursery. Completed in 1939, the administration building features the

simple but elegant CCC building style. To complement the formal landscaped entrance, builders added classical columns, side lights and three group windows in the gable end of the building, all of which are truly unique for this kind of government facility. The formal symmetry and elegance of the nursery, particularly in such a remote site in Montana, were as much a surprise to travelers in the 1930s as they are today.

## 8. BENCH MARKS

Up the road from here you can see remnants of the upper benches, where seedlings were first grown at Savenac.

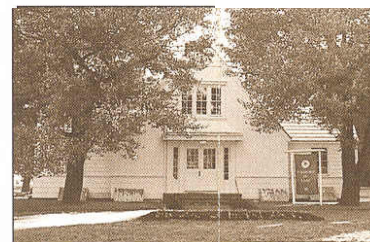
As you explore this area, you'll find the original wooden planting signs (look for Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine Stock signs from 1911). You'll see the original irrigation dam which made water available to the entire nursery. You'll also see Savenac's oldest standing structure—an outhouse built around 1930.

## 9. A LIVING LEGACY

Large signs encouraged motorists on the new Yellowstone Trail to visit Savenac. As early as 1916, improvements were made to accommodate them. Ornamental trees and shrubs were planted, and an arboretum was built on the east side of Savenac Creek next to the Yellowstone Trail. Soon foresters from around the country came to see the Forest Service's showplace nursery, and to request excess ornamentals for their own facilities. In 1938, the arboretum was moved by the CCC to the west side of the site and dedicated to the



*Savenac Administration Building, 1910*



*Savenac Administration Building Today, Built in 1939*

Forest Service employees who died in the 1910 fire. It is a fitting tribute. As you amble through the arboretum, note that trees from all over grow together in this living memorial. Look for Subalpine Fir, Grand Fir, Ponderosa Pine and White Pine peacefully co-existing with Colorado Blue Spruce, White Spruce, Quaking Aspen and Western Larch. Savenac's arboretum is one of the few places you'll see such a unique combination of trees.



## 10. WATCHING THE WEATHER

After walking through the arboretum, look for the weather station at the south entrance. Weather has always played a critical role in managing the nation's public lands, and Savenac is no exception. As early as 1912, nursery personnel began working with the U.S. Weather Bureau as a cooperative weather observer. By 1919, a full-scale Forest Service weather station was established, complete with a Cotton Region style box to [monitor temperature], an anemometer to measure the wind, and a rain gauge. In 1962, Savenac was recognized by the U.S. Weather Bureau for fifty years



of service monitoring the weather. Look for the award once you're inside the Administration Building.

## 11. REMEMBERING THE BIG BURN

From this spot, you can see some of the 78 spruce trees which were planted in the arboretum for the 78 Forest Service employees killed in the fire of 1910. Follow the trail down to the bottom of the hill to see the 1910 Big Burn Memorial Rock, which was dug from the middle of Silver Creek and moved to the site in 1941. The rock was so heavy it began to sink in its new home, so it was raised with hand jacks and concrete was poured to make a base. Because of the outbreak of World War II, the dedication of Memorial Rock was delayed until 1996.

*The Big Burn of 1910 destroyed millions of acres of timber as well as the Savenac Nursery and adjacent towns.*



## TODAY AT SAVENAC...

Savenac's nursery operation came to a halt in 1969 when its duties were transferred to the nursery in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Since then, the U.S. Forest Service has maintained Savenac as an administration facility where it hosts educational and environmental programs for children and young adults. It is also available to the public through the Cabin Rental Program. In addition, Savenac serves as an interpretive center, where the public can experience some of the history of the region and better understand the continuing role the Forest Service has played in the American West.

LOLO NATIONAL FOREST



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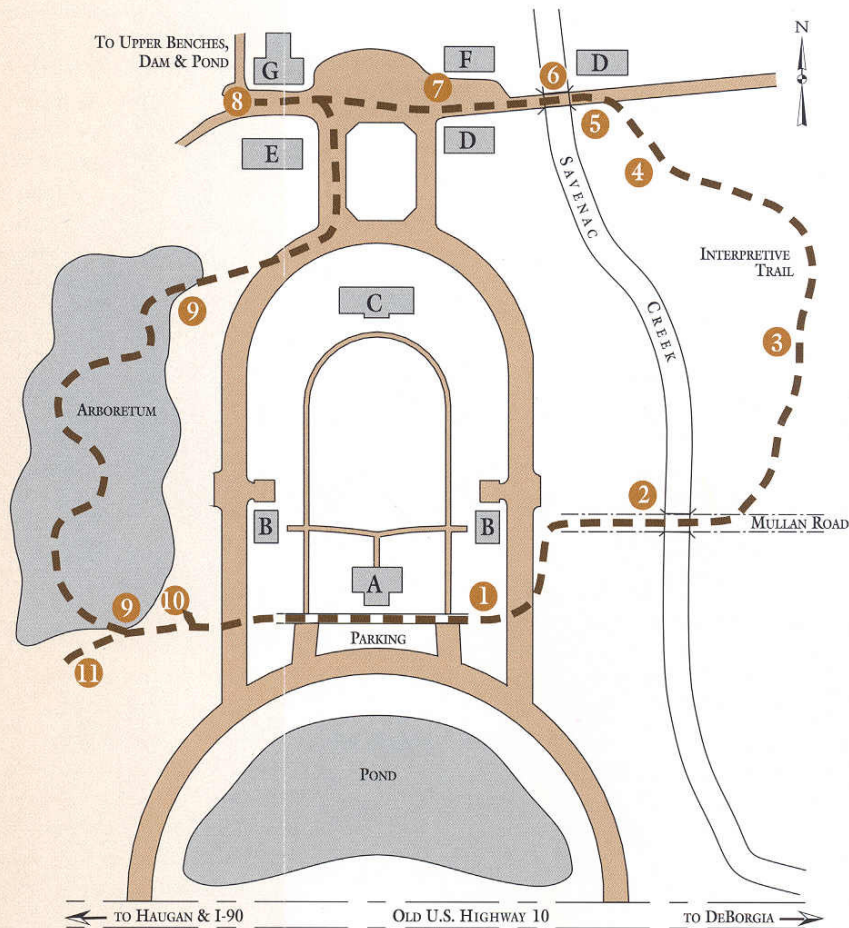
# SAVENAC HISTORICAL INTERPRETIVE TRAIL

Our self-guided, interpretive trail follows old pathways with stone, cement, grass and gravel surfaces. The inner, horseshoe loop is the most easily accessed by persons in wheelchairs. Allow a comfortable 45 minutes to walk

the entire loop. Vehicular traffic beyond the parking area is allowed only by special permission. Please see receptionist inside the administration building for additional information.

## INTERPRETIVE STOPS

1. Introduction
2. Mullan Road & Yellowstone Bridge
3. Plantation
4. Elers Koch Tree
5. Research & Development
6. CCC Bridge
7. Nursery Operation Buildings
8. Road to Upper Benches & Dam
9. Arboretum
10. Weather Station
11. Fire Memorial



## BUILDINGS

**A** Administration Building/Office

**B** Residence w/Garage

**C** Cookhouse (former Residence)

**D** Warehouse

**E** Bunk House (former Equipment Shed)

**F** Garage

**G** Old Packing Plant